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OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Annual report of the United Nations Children's Fund to the Economic and Social Council

SUMMARY

The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 29 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 48/162 of 20 December 1993, paragraph 7 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1994/33 of 28 July 1994 and Economic and Social Council decision 1994/293 of 28 July 1994.

Chapter I outlines measures taken in the implementation of the triennial policy review of operational activities and chapter II discusses activities and measures undertaken within the designated theme of the Economic and Social Council's high-level meeting of the operational activities segment. In 1995, this focuses on implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the International Conference on Population and Development. Chapter III relates to the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development.

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I. MEASURES TAKEN IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROVISIONS OF THE TRIENNIAL POLICY REVIEW OF OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

A. Introduction

1. The Executive Director believes that General Assembly resolution 47/199 of 22 December 1992 represents a landmark in promoting inter-agency collaboration and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has placed a high priority on implementing its provisions, both collectively with its partners and directly within the organization itself.

2. There are a large number of significant elements to the resolution. However, one hallmark of the resolution is the emphasis on establishing common goals and strategies (such as through the country strategy note) around which the United Nations system can mobilize. Another hallmark is the emphasis on strengthening the role of the Government in coordination, emphasizing the need for United Nations assistance to be linked with that of external donors and, of course, national resources. Finally, the resolution also emphasizes moving the United Nations system towards greater flexibility in the mechanisms for providing assistance through its emphasis on the programme approach, national execution and adaptation of rules and procedures.

3. In short, resolution 47/199 has come to represent a conceptual shift whereby inter-agency collaboration moves from a limited focus on administrative control towards an effort to create strong alliances for action within the United Nations system.

4. The present report was prepared prior to the drafting of the Secretary-General's triennial report on these issues. In that report, there will be a detailed enumeration of the specific issues and achievements by UNICEF as well as by all the United Nations system. Therefore, the present report will seek to focus more on the broad UNICEF perspective on those issues.

5. The following sections summarize UNICEF follow-up to the key parts of resolution 47/199 that are most relevant to UNICEF operations. They first discuss the effort to establish common goals and strategies (such as through the country strategy note) and then address programme issues (such as the harmonization of cycles, the resident coordinator system, field committees, evaluation and monitoring, programming procedures and programme terminology), followed by operational issues (such as common premises, simplification and harmonization of procedures, a common manual, management audit systems, decentralization and delegation of authority and training).

B. Common goals and strategies

6. For several years, as Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) Committee on Operational Activities, the Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, proposed that there should be a common United Nations strategy document. Three years ago, UNICEF proposed to its partners in ACC that the United Nations system should establish country strategy notes which, in countries so choosing, would serve as a mechanism for drawing together common goals and strategies in the United Nations system. This proposal was ultimately approved unanimously by ACC and subsequently considered by the General Assembly and made an important part of resolution 47/199.

7. UNICEF has pursued very actively the implementation of this provision both through advocacy and support at the headquarters level and through a very active role at the country level. To begin with, formal guidance was given to UNICEF field staff underlining the high priority the Executive Director attaches to supporting this initiative. UNICEF field and headquarters staff also participated in the training seminar on this issue held in Turin, Italy. Above all, support to the development of country strategy notes has been discussed on a regular basis by senior UNICEF staff with all field representatives.

8. As a result, there has been a highly significant involvement in providing support to Governments and to the resident coordinator, often involving major commitments of staff time and analytical resources. For child-related issues, it has been the experience of UNICEF that Governments frequently choose to draw upon their national programmes of action for implementing the commitments of the World Summit for Children. This illustrates a highly useful interaction between a major summit and the key elements that help coordinate and focus United Nations efforts at the country level.

9. Final reporting on progress in the preparation of country strategy notes will be provided by the Secretary-General in his report to the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly. At the time of this writing, UNICEF is aware of some 64 countries that have chosen to prepare a country strategy note. The first completed country strategy note was transmitted to the United Nations by the UNICEF regional director, who was acting as resident coordinator at the time. In addition to the three country strategy notes that have been completed, UNICEF is also aware of some 13 countries where there is a draft country strategy note and 16 more where the draft is being formulated and is likely to be finalized soon.

10. The recent agreements reached at the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the World Summit for Social Development and the probable conclusions from the Fourth World Conference on Women are likely to help serve as guideposts for future United Nations efforts at the country level. It will be important that every effort be made to support Governments in their efforts to implement these conclusions and to maximize their value as a coordinating tool.

11. Likewise, there are many other efforts under way to help define common goals and strategies. For example, in Bangladesh, UNICEF was requested to be the lead organization in helping to prepare a common United Nations "vision" document, entitled "A fork in the path", and elaborated in close cooperation with the Government. Such efforts might be high-priority areas for replication in a wider range of countries. Likewise, mechanisms such as round tables and consultative groups offer special opportunities to help define common goals and strategies among United Nations and other partners with the Government.

12. In short, it would be highly advantageous to make more systematic and comprehensive use of the type of country-specific opportunities that are available to define more clearly common goals and strategies as a basis for stronger inter-agency collaboration.

C. Harmonization of programme cycles

13. The Joint Consultative Group on Policy (JCGP) Subgroup on Harmonization, under the chairmanship of UNICEF, constantly reviewed the status of harmonization of programme cycles as reported by the designated geographic focal points (the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) for Asia, UNICEF for Africa and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Middle East and North Africa) and helped to coordinate the

agencies where cycles appear different. Working groups, comprising the geographic sections/bureaux of each agency, have convened to analyse the responses to the letter on harmonization of programme cycles addressed by the executive heads of the three member organizations with programme cycles (UNDP, UNFPA and UNICEF) and to discuss efforts aimed at coordinating and expediting the agreement of the preferred timing for harmonization. As a result, three different lists of countries have emerged for each region: (a) list A, showing countries that already have achieved harmonization of programme cycles; (b) list B, of countries likely to achieve harmonization with some adjustment; and (c) list C, essentially of emergency-type countries that are unlikely to achieve harmonization in the near future.

14. In reviewing the situation of harmonization of programme cycles, the subgroup has provided guidance and support to the working groups. In the case of harmonization in Africa, a memorandum, co-signed by the UNFPA and UNICEF Deputy Executive Directors for Programmes and the UNDP Assistant Administrator, Africa Bureau, was issued in May 1994 to request UNDP resident representatives, UNFPA country directors and UNICEF representatives in Africa to make a joint statement reflecting an agreement reached by the three organizations on a preferred timing for harmonization in accordance with the existing operational guidelines.

15. As stated in the report of the Secretary-General on progress on the implementation of General Assembly resolution 47/199 (E/1994/64), which was submitted to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1994, "there is now a plan in place on the harmonization of programming cycles for all countries except where local conditions are not conducive to such an approach. It will be implemented with the start of the new programme cycle" (para. 21). The latest status of the harmonization of programme cycles is given in the table below; 80 per cent of the countries have either already harmonized their programme cycles or will do so upon the expiration of the current country programmes.

Status of harmonization of programme cycles by region

Region	List A (Harmonization achieved)	List B (Harmonization likely)	List C (Harmonization not likely)
Africa	10	22	12
Americas and the Caribbean	4	17	2
Asia	11	8	4
Middle East and North Africa (or Arab Bureau)	2	8	2
Total	27 (26%)	55 (54%)	20 (20%)

D. The resident coordinator system: widening the pool

16. The selection process for resident coordinators/resident representatives was agreed upon by JCGP at its high-level meeting in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in February 1994. JCGP executive heads are committed to widening the pool of qualified development professionals eligible for appointment as resident coordinators/resident representatives, together with increased transparency in the selection process. The JCGP executive heads agreed that the members of JCGP will assist UNDP to define country-specific requirements for the resident coordinator/resident representative vacancies. Candidates will be drawn primarily from the human resources of the JCGP organizations themselves. However, candidates also may be recommended and drawn from sources such as the United Nations system, member Governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector.

17. JCGP executive heads further agreed to make their recommendations based on country-specific requirements and the existing criteria reflecting system-wide discussions, and with special reference to areas emphasized in resolution 47/199.

18. The Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions also completed its review and updating of the resident coordinator guidelines to bring them in line with the current state of operational activities and the spirit of resolution 47/199. UNICEF, as one of the organizations with a strong and effective field presence, played an instrumental role in updating the guidelines.

E. Field committees

19. UNICEF has strongly advocated that through the resident coordinator system, field committees be established to help guide the coordination of operational activities in the respective countries. These could prove very useful in helping to promote the common goals and strategies, as well as in helping to examine how programmes and projects relate to these objectives. The committees, when functioning well, have theme groups led by organizations' staff who are technically and operationally best suited to do so.

F. Evaluation and monitoring

20. The conceptual paper, "Harmonization of monitoring and evaluation", was completed in June 1994 by the Working Group on Evaluation and Monitoring and reviewed in early September by the Subgroup on Harmonization. Incorporating the comments and observations made by the subgroup, a concept paper on "Harmonization of monitoring and evaluation" has now been produced.

21. It was found that a substantial degree of harmony already exists between the evaluation systems of JCGP members. The review revealed few, if any, substantive differences of consequence. The underlying principles, while not totally identical, are by and large indistinguishable in substance. The differences are mainly differences of terminology, detail, emphasis or institutional framework. As a start, the work has now commenced with the harmonization of product formats to ensure a common understanding of concepts and to facilitate the sharing of information.

22. The next phase of the exercise will include:

(a) Project evaluation policies, procedures and products;

(b) Programme evaluation policies, concepts, terminology and products;

(c) Monitoring products for both projects and country programmes.

23. The harmonization process has also facilitated the identification of specific and tangible measures that will help to actuate cooperation between the agencies. Such measures will include:

(a) The establishment of a system that will give each agency computerized access to the evaluation databases of the other agencies;

(b) The establishment of a joint consultant roster;

(c) The holding of joint training in evaluation techniques;

(d) The holding of joint evaluation missions.

G. Programming procedures

24. The issue of harmonizing and simplifying programming processes is being examined by a newly established working group, working under the JCGP Subgroup on Harmonization chaired by UNICEF. In principle, the group reviews the possibility of undertaking common situation analysis exercises in countries that have harmonized their programming cycles and have agreed on the preparation of a country strategy note. The ultimate aim of the subgroup will be to recommend the process and content of the proposed common situation analysis. As a first step, the working group will review and compare the current programming process carried out by JCGP agencies and ensure that senior staff with responsibilities for programming in their organizations are involved in the work of the working group.

H. Programme terminology

25. A report on "Harmonization of key terminologies in the United Nations development activities", prepared by the JCGP Subgroup on Harmonization in compliance with recent resolutions/decisions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, was distributed in January 1994, for information, to all United Nations resident coordinators, country directors and representatives of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food Programme.

26. The importance of reaching a common understanding of key programme-related terms was solicited by resolution 47/199, and had previously been highlighted by the JCGP Subgroup on Harmonization in 1992 in response to General Assembly resolution 44/211 of 22 December 1989.

I. Common premises

27. To date, 30 UNICEF offices share common premises with other United Nations organizations. To accelerate this trend further, UNDP and UNICEF, within the context of JCGP, have determined the financial and organizational implications of expanding the number of common premises. Some 45 country-based offices have been identified for possible move into common premises over the next biennium, with others to follow as and when it becomes feasible for contractual, financial and organizational reasons.

28. A subgroup of JCGP has undertaken considerable work in the area of analysing the viability of establishing common premises and in the actual setting up of a number of such premises throughout the developing countries. A Joint Inspection Unit report on the United Nations system common premises and services in the field has made a detailed analysis of the current status (see JIU/REP/94/8).

J. Simplification and harmonization of procedures

29. Internally, UNICEF continues to simplify and, where appropriate, eliminate rules and procedures that do not advance the effectiveness of programming. Furthermore, within the context of JCGP, UNICEF has examined the prospects of preparing a system-wide manual as proposed in resolution 47/199. It has been determined collectively that for important reasons, including divergence of mandate, modus operandi etc., a comprehensive compendium of common rules and procedures within the United Nations system would not be cost-effective or productive at this stage. However, the JCGP organizations could already work together to create the building blocks of a common document that would reduce the burden imposed on Governments and fulfil the purpose of a "common manual".

K. Common manual

30. The JCGP general meeting has indicated repeatedly that although the compilation of a comprehensive compendium of common rules and procedures within the United Nations system would not be cost-effective or productive at this stage, there were, however, specific areas where JCGP organizations could already work together to create the building blocks of a common document that would reduce the burden imposed upon Governments and fulfil the purpose of a manual.

31. The overall coordination of the process of developing a body of common procedures is being carried out by the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development of the United Nations Secretariat in line with its responsibility to report on the progress on the implementation of resolution 47/199.

L. Management audit systems

32. JCGP internal audit services are now meeting periodically with the objective of promoting harmonization of management audit systems among the members of JCGP. The first meeting took place in Rome, following the twenty-fifth meeting of the representatives of internal audit services of United Nations organizations and multilateral financial institutions in May 1994.

33. Consensus was reached that the objective of the internal audit services is to assist each organization in the effective discharge of its responsibilities. Management auditing furnishes its respective agencies with analyses, appraisals and recommendations concerning the activities reviewed, specifically with respect to the adequacy and effectiveness of the organization's system of internal control and the quality of performance.

34. The working group on management audit systems has covered the following areas of work during the period:

(a) Re-emphasis of audit standards;

(b) Exchange of information of computer-assisted audit techniques;

(c) Use of contractors to perform internal audits. The experiences of UNDP and UNFPA were discussed, and it was found that the use of commercial contractors could be a means of enhancing audit coverage and frequency;

(d) Aid accountability. The harmonization of procedures among agencies was seen as an important factor for enhancing government capacities, thus enabling them to discharge their functions and responsibilities effectively;

(e) Plan for undertaking joint audits of programmes and projects. While the value of such undertakings was recognized, it was felt that the matter required further discussion and thought;

(f) Harmonization of auditor training.

35. Together with the representatives of other United Nations organizations and multilateral financial institutions, the working group discussed the advantages and disadvantages of developing a common audit manual. A broad consensus was reached that it was neither practical nor feasible given the diversity of entity profiles and portfolios. However, it was agreed to exchange audit manuals so that the inherent diversity due to the operating environment could be used positively to promote harmonization of audit among them.

M. Decentralization and delegation of programming and authority

36. The UNICEF record in decentralization and delegation of authority remains the strongest in the United Nations system. All country programmes are negotiated, researched and prepared at the country level, with the effective authority for the entire programming cycle firmly in the hands of the country office and the recipient Government. Once a country programme recommendation has been approved by the Executive Board, the front-line authority for the implementation of the approved programme is firmly in the hands of the country office and the recipient Government.

37. Along with this delegated authority comes a strong degree of accountability for results and proper management. Country offices are accountable for meeting the goals and programme targets that have been established with the recipient Governments. They are equally responsible for the corresponding need to ensure that effective advocacy and mobilization are undertaken to guarantee popular participation in programmes and national commitment.

N. Training

38. The Training and Staff Development Section, Division of Personnel, is currently involved in a number of activities with other United Nations agencies and is an active member of the Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ) Subcommittee on Training and the JCGP Subgroup on Personnel and Training.

39. Within the context of the JCGP Subgroup on Personnel and Training, two activities deserve mention: completion of a package on orientation to the United Nations for all new staff; and completion of an HIV/AILS "Train the trainer" package for United Nations staff, also available in Spanish and French. This was a UNICEF-led initiative and is a good example of inter-agency collaboration at the implementation level. The subgroup also has been supportive of the Turin-based workshops on management of field coordination, with individual agencies providing substantive, technical and financial support to the programme.

40. The CCAQ Subcommittee on Training has had ongoing discussions on management development and management training. UNICEF is an active party to these discussions, which will result in more systematic sharing of the best management training practices of the various agencies. The Subcommittee has also undertaken a training module on sexual harassment for staff, with the participation of JCGP members.

41. UNICEF and the United Nations are completing a joint module on critical incident stress management for use by staff in the system. UNICEF has taken the lead on this, building on the work done in the Eastern and Southern Africa regions. The UNICEF safe motherhood training package will be one of the main sources of materials for the work of the Steering Committee of the Joint Programme for Strengthening National Capacity to Reduce Maternal Deaths and Disabilities.

42. UNICEF is also an active participant in the joint training of field teams in support of the implementation of resolution 47/199, being carried out at the International Labour Organization Training Centre in Turin.

II. FOLLOW-UP TO THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

43. At its 1995 substantive session, beginning at the end of June, the Economic and Social Council will be discussing the follow-up to ICPD as the principal theme for the high-level meeting of the operational activities segment. In its resolution 1994/33 of 28 July 1994, the Council requested that the funds and programmes devote a section of their annual report to the Council to their activities related to this theme. Therefore, while the current report should be seen in the context of previous reporting to the Executive Board on the UNICEF role in population-related issues, the present chapter is limited to involvement in ICPD follow-up activities.

44. Clearly, ICPD has the potential for becoming a landmark in the development field. In particular, if actively followed up, ICPD may come to have "ratified" a major shift in development thinking on population issues that has been under way for several years. Broadly speaking, this shift emphasizes the role of providing for basic health needs, basic education (especially for girls) and women's empowerment as major elements in the population field. This emphasis is very close to the approach that has been taken by UNICEF, as underlined by the Executive Board, for a number of years.

45. Therefore, ICPD and its follow-up processes can contribute greatly to UNICEF efforts as defined by its core mandate, and UNICEF has a special responsibility to be an active and supportive participant in the follow-up process. Indeed, in some areas, such as ICPD support to the World Summit for Children goals, the ICPD process provides links to some of the highest priorities of UNICEF.

46. That process began in mid-December 1994 when, on behalf of the Secretary-General and at the request of the Administrator of UNDP, the Executive Director of UNFPA convened the first meeting of the Inter-Agency Task Force on the implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action. UNICEF actively participated in the meeting and strongly supported the approach taken, i.e., to focus on specific practical actions where the United Nations system could play a supportive and constructive role, particularly at the country level. It was decided to set up working groups in the following areas:

(a) Support to data systems at the national level, especially in the areas of infant, child and maternal mortality. This working group will be chaired by UNICEF and will be meeting shortly;

(b) Basic education (with special attention to girls' and women's education);

(c) Advocacy efforts in relation to social development issues;

(d) Support to practical actions by Governments for improving the empowerment and status of women.

47. Most of these groups will have work under way by the time the Council meets, and the Secretary-General will be providing an update on their progress. While it is still early in the inter-agency process, UNICEF believes these efforts have begun on a very positive basis.

48. The follow-up to ICPD is also being coordinated through ACC, which reviewed the follow-up process at the executive-head level in late February. Special emphasis is being placed on country-level coordination through the resident coordinator system and through use of key coordination tools, such as the country strategy note. Particular attention is also being paid to linkages with the NGO community at the country level.

49. The Executive Director has already given guidance to UNICEF field offices and senior staff to play an active and constructive role in the follow-up process. This guidance commends to the attention of UNICEF staff issues such as child survival and health, women's health and safe motherhood, education, empowerment of women and the girl child, children and youth, urban issues and male responsibility.

50. Progress in UNICEF efforts at the headquarters and field levels to support ICPD follow-up will be reviewed regularly both within UNICEF by senior management and collectively by senior management with UNICEF partners.

III. FOLLOW-UP TO THE WORLD SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

51. A separate report on UNICEF participation in the follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development (E/ICEF/1995/19) will be considered by the Executive Board at its annual session.